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An Address  
by  
George C. Rogers, Jr.



South Carolina  
American Revolution Bicentennial Commission

An address  
given  
by appointment of  
the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission  
on the occasion of  
the two hundredth anniversary of  
the evacuation of Charleston by the British  
on  
Tuesday, the fourteenth of December, 1982  
at ten-thirty o'clock in the morning,  
Trinity Cathedral,  
Columbia, South Carolina

by  
George C. Rogers, Jr.

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“Standing in the living present,  
Memory and hope between, . . .”

### *Not Alone For Mighty Empire*

William Henry Drayton and Arthur Middleton were the two most radical of the South Carolina patriots. One grew up at Drayton Hall; the other at Middleton Place, estates which represent the peak of the life-styles of the lowcountry elite. But Drayton and Middleton were not aristocrats in a European sense; they were staunch republicans warring against European monarchy. The grandeur of Louis XVI at Versailles was abhorred, and though George III had no comparable palace in England, his Herrenhausen in Hanover was as magnificent and intricately wrought as a Bach cantata. It is true that the lowcountry elite led the Revolution in South Carolina, but it was the necessary first step in the movement from monarchy to the creation of the South Carolina republic.

The revolution was not all bloodshed and passionate display. There was time for deep thought about human nature. In the midst of the American Revolution John Adams wrote in his diary that he had stayed at home all day "thinking."

William Henry Drayton and Arthur Middleton after the glorious Battle of Fort Sullivan on June 28, 1776, paused to ponder designs for a state seal. There are Middleton documents — fragments — which reveal trial sketches and consideration of various mottoes. You will see the seal that these two young men fashioned at the Columbia Museum of Art later this morning. Note that the reverse of the seal depicts a female figure symbolizing Hope walking along a sandy beach with a rising sun on the horizon — "dawn's early light."

Suns, globes, spheres were emblems of the Age of Reason. One of the imaginative conceptions of the French revolutionary architect Etienne-Louis Boullée was a cenotaph in honor of Sir Isaac Newton, preeminently the man of reason. The monument was quite simple — a naked sphere unadorned. American and French revolutionaries hoped to launch new states like a child releasing a bunch of balloons — "Of shining worlds in splendor through the skies."

There is a story told about Benjamin Franklin which illustrates the importance of such symbolism. While the last members were signing the United States Constitution in Independence Hall in mid-September 1787, "Doctor Franklin looking towards the President's Chair, at the back of which a rising sun happened to be painted, observed to a few members near him, that Painters had found it difficult to distinguish in their art a rising from a setting sun. I have, said he, often in the course of the Session, and the vicissitudes of my hopes and fears as to its issue, looked at that behind the President without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting: But now at length I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting Sun." In our state seal we can be quite sure that we have a rising sun, because on Sullivan's Island the sun could only rise from the Atlantic. For Europeans the sun would be setting in that sea.



David Ramsay in 1778 in the first fourth of July oration to be delivered in South Carolina best described what separation from Europe meant to the patriots.

“Our present form of government is every way preferable to the royal one we have lately renounced. It is much more favourable to purity of morals, and better calculated to promote all our important interests. Honesty, plain-dealing, and simple manners, were never made the patterns of courtly behaviour. Artificial manners always prevail in kingly governments; and royal courts are reservoirs, from whence insincerity, hypocrisy, dissimulation, pride, luxury, and extravagance, deluge and overwhelm the body of the people. On the other hand, republicks are favourable to truth, sincerity, frugality, industry, and simplicity of manners. Equality, the life and soul of Commonwealth, cuts off all pretensions to preferment, but those which arise from extraordinary merit: Whereas in royal governments, he that can best please his superiors, by the low arts of fawning and adulation, is most likely to obtain favour.”

Ramsay continued: “It was the interest of Great-Britain to encourage our dissipation and extravagance, for the two-fold purpose of *increasing the sale of her manufactures*, and of *perpetuating our subordination*. In vain we sought to check the growth of luxury, by sumptuary laws; every wholesome restraint of this kind was sure to meet with the royal negative: While the whole force of example was employed to induce us to copy the dissipated manners of the country from which we sprung. If therefore, we had continued dependent, our frugality, industry, and simplicity of manners, would have been lost in an imitation of British extravagance, idleness, and false refinements.”

Gordon Wood has written in his superb book, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, that “Republicanism . . . added a moral dimension, a utopian depth to the political separation from England.”

But Ramsay’s oration was delivered four and a half years before the evacuation of the city of Charleston. There was much fighting to come between. The first phase of the fighting — that in 1776 — may have been Charleston’s victory, the lowcountry’s victory, but the ultimate victory was a rising of the whole citizenry of the state. Charleston surrendered to Clinton and Cornwallis on May 12, 1780, and was never recaptured, although the British were finally forced to leave. General Nathanael Greene marched with his continental army into the lowcountry and camped at Round O in Colleton County supported on all sides by the guerrilla bands of Thomas Sumter and Andrew Pickens, Francis Marion and William Harden. The army protected the legislature which met at Jacksonboro in January and February 1782. That legislature represented the state in a way in which no prewar assembly had ever done. It was filled with army officers and upcountry representatives and sought vengeance against the Tories so many of whom were lowcountry planters and Charleston merchants.

Savannah was evacuated by the British on July 11, 1782. For the next five months General Nathanael Greene squeezed the British around Charleston mightily. The British commander General Alexander Leslie made his preparations for evacuation and in treaty with General Anthony Wayne made arrangements for the entry of the American forces into the city. The British



were to leave their redoubts on the morning of December 14 at the firing of the morning gun "at which time General Wayne should move on slowly, and take possession; and from thence to follow the British troops into town, keeping at a respectful distance (say about two hundred yards) and when the British troops after passing through the town gates, should file off to [Christopher] Gadsden's wharf, General Wayne was to proceed into town, which was done with great order and regularity, except now and then the British called to General Wayne that he was too fast upon them, which occasioned him to halt a little. About 11 o'clock, A.M. the American troops marched into town and took post at the state-house," at the corner of Broad and Meeting streets. The British galleys in the Ashley and Cooper Rivers "dropped down in a line" with the American troops "the whole length of the Neck."

At three p.m. General Greene and Governor Mathews entered the town with Generals Gist and Moultrie.

The enemy fleet lay at anchor from Fort Johnson to Five Fathom Hole "in a curve line, as the current runs," for three days until they crossed the bar and sailed on the 17th of December. During those three days the rebel standard was not raised in the town. Some of the British ships went to Jamaica, some to East Florida, some to New York, some to Halifax. Among those who sailed directly to England was Lieutenant Governor William Bull who carried with him the royal seal.

As General William Moultrie later recorded in his memoirs: "I cannot forget that happy day when we marched into Charlestown with the American troops; . . . This fourteenth day of December, 1782, ought never to be forgotten by the Carolinians; it ought to be a day of festivity with them, and it was the real day of their deliverance and independence." Thus the day we celebrate was a glorious one in the annals of the American Revolution. There was now hope for a new society. The old one was scattered and had to be reassembled.

As the South Carolinians watched the vessels disappear below the horizon, they gradually turned around and looked to the westward, to the interior. Their principal task was to construct the republic of virtue, which Ramsay had described. The three constitutions of 1776, 1778, and 1790 represented a period of experimentation with forms. A privy council was tried and discarded. The veto of the governor was given and taken away. To that generation the key to the matter was the connection between structure and character. A perfect structure was not enough; it could not function properly without a virtuous people. And they knew that the world watched. In 1776 John Rutledge had told his fellow citizens that "The Eyes of Europe, nay of the World, are on America."

The most apt word for the new form of government was commonwealth, "a state belonging to the whole people rather than the Crown." An important task was how to incorporate the upcountry farmers with the lowcountry elite, admittedly in such a way that the lowcountry elite did not lose immediate control of the government, but in such a way that the two regions would make good partners.

Two steps were taken to this end in the 1780's. The legislature voted to move the capital to the interior of the state. Early in March 1786 a vote was taken in



the Senate on whether the new city on the clay cliffs of the Congaree should be named Washington or Columbia. Columbia, the name suggested by John Lewis Gervais, was the Senate's choice by a vote of eleven to seven. The selection of Columbia symbolized an interest in antique models, especially Roman ones, as indeed did the selection of the word Senate for the upper house of the legislature.

It is fitting that this ceremony marking the 200th anniversary of the evacuation of Charleston should be held in Columbia because the most immediate and significant result of the British departure was the establishment of the South Carolina republic. Charleston was named for Charles II, an English king. Columbia, the Latinized form for Columbus, was a short-hand reference to the republics of the ancient world which might serve as models for new states. Charleston was the past; Columbia the future.

This move was endorsed by the holding of the state constitutional convention in Columbia in 1790. The decision to place the capital at Columbia was reaffirmed at that convention. The upcountry obtained a somewhat greater representation in the legislature than it had had. Yet there would be two treasurers for the state, one residing in Columbia and one in Charleston. The Secretary of State and the Surveyor General would each have a deputy, and thus there would be two offices, one in the lowcountry and one in the upcountry. The expectations of those who had made the Revolution had materialized in what the Constitution of 1790 styled "The State of South Carolina."

But we cannot simply say well done; we can only say well started. There was something else embedded in this decade of constitution-making. As the historian David Ramsay wrote: "The science of politics" had been placed "on a footing with the other sciences, by opening it to improvements from experience, and the discoveries of future ages."

In order to pick up all the threads of the story inherent in that distant period we must think of the "living present." We must make this day a consideration of our total story, not just of an isolated moment in the past. We must take seriously that line from the "Prayer for Our Country" which Bishop Beckham has just so eloquently read: "fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues."

For white South Carolinians that process had been accomplished by the 1820's. French Huguenots, Scots, Germans, Swiss, Welsh, Irish, English had become a new thing, a South Carolinian. Perhaps not so quickly yet inevitably Angolans, Gambians, Calabars, Ibos, Coromantees, Mandingos, Whydahs had become black Carolinians. But there were still two distinct cultural worlds.

Let me contrast 1782 with 1945. In 1782 we cut ourselves off from monarchical Europe and thus turned our attentions to the establishment of a republic. In 1945 we had defeated the totalitarian regimes of Germany and Italy. We had observed with abhorrence what masses inflamed by passions could do to vulnerable minorities. So those of us returning in 1945, like the veterans of the Revolution in 1782, had a job to do. To make all truly one. In 1782 the goal was to gather all the white people together into a new society; in



1945 the goal was to incorporate all peoples, black and white, men and women, into the Carolina society.

We can find our inspiration in the words of the hymn *Not Alone For Mighty Empire* which we have just sung:

Make our nation free indeed;  
Keep her faith in simple manhood  
Strong as when her life began,  
Till it finds its full fruition  
In the brotherhood of man!

Nor was the present era unforeseen by those living in the 1780's. On October 22, 1784, the Reverend Richard Price, the leading English radical republican of his day, a Real Whig, a Commonwealthman, an opponent to the then prevailing views in British politics, wrote Henry Laurens, who had just returned to America and sent him six copies of his pamphlet entitled *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, and the Means of making it a Benefit to the World*. Laurens gave one copy to Governor Benjamin Guerard, one copy to the Senate, one to Speaker John Faucheraud Grimké, one to Senator John Lewis Gervais, one to Representative Ralph Izard and kept the sixth for himself. Richard Price had written that the American Revolution had been fought "in favour of universal liberty," that it had opened "a new prospect in human affairs," and begun "a new aera in the history of mankind." But he warned at the conclusion of his pamphlet that the hopes raised would not be fulfilled until the Negro slaves had been freed.

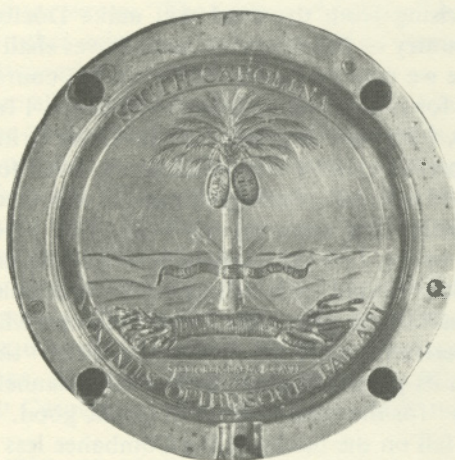
The gifts of pamphlets had been met by silence except in the case of the speaker. In replying to the speaker, Laurens had said "neither Moses & the Prophets nor one rising from the dead will make Doctor Price's doctrine palatable in this Country — but when the poor Slaves shall struggle for themselves, peradventure we may be converted." Laurens confessed to Dr. Price: "The time however for general emancipation will come, I foresee it as clearly, as in the Year 1776, I foresaw & predicted that Great Britain would lose her Colonies by attempts to enslave the Inhabitants." As for his own slaves, Laurens explained: "I am endeavouring to prevent their ever being absolutely Slaves. Time is required for maturing my Plan. You perceive Sir, a whole Country is opposed to me. It is necessary to proceed with discretion. To some of them I already allow Wages, to the whole every reasonable indulgence."

Henry Laurens and his son John were two Carolinians who saw the ultimate meaning of the American Revolution. For young John "the fullest scope for ambition directed in its proper channel, in the only channel in which it ought to be allowed," was "for the advancement of public good." His life was truly a sacrifice when he fell on the banks of the Combahee less than four months before the evacuation of Charleston — that was "the last full measure of devotion." Foolish perhaps, for no one represented better the beau ideal of a magistrate in a republic of virtue.

As I let the entire history of our state roll before my eyes, I see three great movements. The first was to make a virgin land bloom, to produce wealth — from rice and indigo and cotton — and that wealth brought into being an elite who wisely used their wealth to educate their children in the best schools of the



## The Great Seal of South Carolina



world — to understand human nature — to construct republics that hedged in the evil tendencies of our nature and that released the voices of the people in measured periods, not in bursts of passion — to give time for thought — to understand the need for good men to run the institutions of government — to perceive the intimate relationship between structure and character. Fortunately they were given a measure of calm in which they could think and work and make their contributions. And they did it not only for their own states, but also for the nation as a whole. And let there be no mistake — the work of that generation was of the highest order — I am not sure that it can ever be repeated.

A constant theme of discourse in the early years of the nation concerned the preservation of the republic. An eloquent statement of this concern is Thomas Rhett Smith's fourth of July oration of 1802 delivered in St. Michael's Church in Charleston by appointment of the American Revolution Society. He asked his audience to consider — as I now ask you — “How far we have conformed to the principles with which we set out, and how long we are likely to retain the prize for which we struggled so hard. . . .” The American Revolution, according to Smith, was unlike any other Revolution in history for it had not consumed its leaders. It had occurred at just the right time. If it had occurred sooner, America would not have been sufficiently inhabited to sustain the fight; if later, it would have been sucked into the maelstrom of the French Revolution and would not have stopped “at the precise point of temperate liberty.” “Our severest trials” had come after the fighting was over. We needed the period of humiliation in the 1780's; we needed to *feel*, before we acted. Thus the Constitution was also made at the only possible time that it could have been constructed. If the Constitutional Convention had been postponed three years, the document would never have been put together. The date of the birth of the republic was less important than the date on which it was saved. 1787 was more important than 1776.

The second great movement was that by which the lowcountry agreed to share power with the upcountry. That movement got under way in the 1780's. In 1794 and 1795 there took place in South Carolina a great debate over the nature of representation, as the upcountry challenged the lowcountry's view that representation should be based on property as well as on numbers. Robert Goodloe Harper, speaking for the upcountry, wrote: “A state in which one fifth of the people can make laws to bind the other four fifths, cannot be free. It may be a mild aristocracy; from particular circumstances it may long continue so: but it is an aristocracy still; . . .” Harper pointed out that one free man in Beaufort had as much power as seven in Ninety Six. The movement for reform culminated in a constitutional amendment in 1808 by which, though representation would still be based on numbers and taxes paid, the upcountry finally secured an equal voice in the state legislature. In 1810 the constitution of 1790 was amended to provide for complete white manhood suffrage. These compromises were undergirded by the establishment of the College in Columbia which henceforth would train the leadership for the entire state.



The third movement is the one through which all of us have been living during the past three decades. We are here dedicated to see that all share equally in the success of our republican experiment. In this movement we have been ably led by all our recent governors, especially by our own Governor Riley. The crisis of the moment concerns our system of education. The lowcountry elite sent their sons to the dissenting academies in England, to Geneva, to Oxford and Cambridge, and to the Inns of Court. The leaders of the second movement provided a college here in Columbia, a notable institution in antebellum America. Today our educational system is in need of reform — at every level — elementary, secondary, college, and university. We need an educational system to fit our new society.

But I do not want to end on a note of disarray for this is a day of celebration, of jubilation. We have broken our daily routine to come here to demonstrate a happy satisfaction in this anniversary — to portray in some poetic form a way to contribute to public awareness, edification, and enjoyment. It is good to celebrate. Recall the words of the psalm: "O clap your hands together, all ye peoples."

In a world in which almost every one is against almost every thing, it is good to be *for* something. And we are *for* our state. We celebrate today the birth of our state in 1782 and its rebirth in 1982.

I would like to conclude with a quotation from one of America's most distinguished humanists, Jacques Barzun. I draw these words from his most recent book *Critical Questions*:

"We may be too lazy or blind to cooperate in the elimination of our era, but the great comfort is that even if we do not learn the right steps for ending gracefully we shall be reborn just the same. . . . I say 'we,' but I mean our spirit, which starting from boredom will feed on sensation till it recreates idea, emotion, and belief in forms which we cannot imagine but which will make our descendants cry out that it is bliss to be alive in the new dawn and that to be young is very heaven."

As for myself — I am sixty — and still incurably optimistic — as is *my* state—

while I breathe, I hope.